

Literature PBAT

***“Their Eyes Were Watching God” and
“Beloved”***

Assessment: Outstanding

Performance Based Assessment Task

Task: You will write a literary analysis essay focusing on a central idea. Using two pieces of literature you have read, analyze how the author's use of craft, literary techniques, rhetorical devices develops this central idea. Use strong and thorough evidence from the texts to support your analysis. You must demonstrate how the author's use of craft develops the central idea of the work. Do NOT simply summarize the text. Final paper must be typed using size 12 font, double-spaced and be a total of 5-7 pages. Include a works cited page.

Guidelines:

Be sure to

- Identify a central idea demonstrated in both texts
- Analyze how the author's use of craft develops this central idea with each text
- Use strong and thorough evidence from both texts to support your analysis
- Organize your ideas in cohesive and coherent manner
- Maintain a formal style of writing

Step One: Choose one central idea to analyze both pieces of text you have read.

Example: The central idea you identified is -- Revenge—Now write your thesis statement: Revenge is motivated by the need to make others feel the same pain and suffering experienced when wronged, yet it is a thirst unquenched and truly never brings peace to that wrong.

Step Two: Students read significant pieces of text in English class. Students discuss, analyze, look for examples of literary craft, techniques and rhetorical devices.

Step Three: Students choose two pieces of text from all that they have read to use in their final literary analysis essay.

Step Four: Students begin the process of writing the literary analysis essay based on a thesis about the central idea and two pieces of text they have studied.

Step Five:

Student follows the writing process in composing this paper.

Many conferences with teacher take place during the writing process.

Final draft is scored using rubric by two English teachers.

Step Six:

Student presents paper to a committee of three: two teachers and one community member.

Presentation is a student-driven discussion around the analysis of the two pieces of text completed by the student.

The Aftermath

It is hard to love when you had to survive in a life that teaches you to do the exact opposite. The oppression of slavery can reach out and grab the innocent, it follows, ready to drag those, not even from the generation of slavery, into its darkness. For some, the only way to be pulled out of this darkness is to find love and freedom outside of the darkness that cages you. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, the author argues that slavery has altered the act and meaning of love and that there is a right way and a wrong way to love. In *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, the author argues the need to judge due to the slave culture that has been imprinted on today's society. Both authors are telling us that self-love is freedom and that the effects of the wrong kind of love can hold you back, rendering you from becoming your true and free self.

The novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, tells a story about a girl lost in the effects of the wrong type of love. Janie is raised by her ex-slave grandmother, who goes by the name Nanny. Nanny raises Janie to be trapped in the oppressive love of a man that will "protect" her and make sure that she has everything needed to survive. Nanny never teaches her how to love and live for herself but instead, forces her to marry Logan Killicks. When Janie finally realizes that this marriage is not love, she leaves Logan for Joe Starks. Joe is a man who is about his money and his overall "look." This "look" includes a pretty, young woman to keep by his side, making him look good, feel lucky, and be happy. Again, Janie realizes that this oppressive and abusive love; flourishing through the strength of Joe's money is not for her. Joe dies due

to his manly cockiness that kept himself from seeing a doctor. Joe's death, in a way, sets Janie free from their marriage but traps her in the aftermath society's rule of being a widow. With many knowing that Janie is left with money, a home, mayor duties, and a store, the men in the community begin to try to win Janie's heart. With Janie being the type of person she is, she ignores them all until she finds her first true, Tea Cake. Tea Cake is the one and only person who teaches Janie how to love and do for herself. Unfortunately, he dies saving Janie from a rabid dog but even though he is not there physically, he is there spiritually.

Oppression reaches out and grabs Janie by the hair when her Nanny guilts her into a marriage that is not love. She guilts her when she states, " Ah don't want yo' feathers always crumpled by folks throwin' up things in yo face. And Ah can't die easy thinkin' maybe de men folks white or black is makin' a spit cup outa you: Have sympathy fuh me. Put me down easy, Janie, Ah'm a cracked plate" (Hurston, 24). This is Nanny's way of loving Janie. Nanny's love is illustrated through the metaphor of comparing Janie to a bird. Feathers are beautiful and delicate but the negative connotation of her feathers being potentially "crumpled" reveals how easy it would be hurt Janie; that is exactly what Nanny is trying to protect her from but this protection is really oppression. When Nanny states, " 'Put me down easy, Janie, Ah'm a cracked plate'" Hurston is utilizing metaphor to reveal just how fragile Nanny is and that if Janie doesn't do this for her, then it will break her. She makes Janie feel like this is the one thing that she owes Nanny, the one thing that will keep her soul at peace. Nanny only does this out of love although, this love isn't true love. It is the only love Nanny knows due to the fear embedded in her

through slavery. It isn't true love because when you love others then you teach them how to do things on their own, love themselves, and not just survive but live. Nanny never even teaches Janie how to be a woman. She never truly teaches Janie how to live and love herself but instead, teaches her how to stay alive and survive under a man with power and money who will only oppress her. When you have been constantly been beaten, degraded, and told that you're nothing then how could you love yourself? With Nanny being an ex-slave, she wasn't allowed to love herself or anything/ anyone else. Slavery only taught her how to survive, not to love. In fact, slavery taught her exactly how not to love. When you're not able to love yourself, then you'll never truly be able to love someone else.

You can't love someone else if you don't learn to love yourself first. With Janie being taught how to only survive based on someone else taking care of her and not on her own, she struggled with the true definition of love. Janie has her first sexual awakening as a teenage girl under a pear tree, which is symbolized throughout the story as a symbol of growth and self-taught life lessons. This awakening is a representation of Janie finally becoming a young woman without the coddling of Nanny: "She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that

left her limp and languid” (Hurstun, 14). Learning about yourself is the first step to maturity. As Janie learns what it feels to feel love, she has reveals to us her first awakening. This awakening is shown through the personification of “the gold of the sun and the painting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice.” Bringing nature to life shows how real and important this awakening is for Janie. It’s like breathing life into something that was dead. The imagery of the bees and blooming flowers reveal the fertility between the two. The bee is a representation of men and the blooming flower is a representation of Janie turning from a child into a teen/young woman. When things bloom, it brings this feeling of bursting and irresistible life telling us that this awakening is unavoidable. This unavoidable awakening continued to be portrayed through the use of imagery and metaphor of Janie's masturbation scene to show this true connection through “the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight.” By creating the image of Janie’s life and growth factors being in this tree, it tells the reader that this is the point where she is the most down to earth and connected not only with herself, but with nature and life itself. To be this tree is to be alive for Janie. This descriptive scene is pushed by the words “a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid,” showing the reader that she is finally relaxed and comfortable with herself. She has finally grown and is beginning to learn to love herself. This reveals to the reader that this is something that is normal and that it is a stage necessary in life. This is to show that you must learn to love yourself before you attempt to love another.

Before learning to love herself, Janie searches for the love that she hungered for

through Joe Starks, also known as Jody. Janie marries Jody and in this marriage, Janie feels trapped. Here in this marriage her dreams and self-worth begin to rot. Hurston describes Janie as a “rut in the road” (Hurston, 91). The alliteration of the “r” sound in “rut” and “road” reveals how much Janie is rotting on the inside where she has been forced to bottle everything up. The metaphor of the “rut” reveals a feeling of worthlessness that Jody had cast upon her throughout their marriage by making her feel ugly and worthless, inside and out by taking her voice away and hiding her beauty for himself. With Janie being forced to live only in “her hat and her heels” (Hurston, 91), it’s almost as if she was hiding in those things, having to keep all her opinions and emotions to herself, known as her “emotional disturbances.” The “h” sound in “her,” “hat”, and “heels” is to further reveal how much she is hiding and hurting within herself. All of this is to develop Hurston’s larger meaning of the African American woman being the mule of the world.

Nanny, while teaching Janie her lesson about men and love stated, “De white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don’t tote it. He hand it to the womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world” (Hurston, 18). African American women carry the heaviest load of them all. They are left to carry not only the burden of their own lives on their backs but also, the heavy weight of others around them. This reveals that in marriage then and now, women put their pride and happiness aside to keep the man happy and prideful, as Janie did for Jody. This shows how society has trained women to stay silent and to keep the man happy in order to survive.

Toni Morrison also shows the oppression of slavery taking away the ability to truly love in *Beloved*. In *Beloved*, there is a runaway slave by the name of Sethe whose murderous act of love changes her entire life. When trying to protect her children from harm and slavery, she attempts to kill them all with the intent of killing herself at the end. After only successfully killing one child, Beloved, she is forced to live the consequences of her loving actions. In *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, the story follows the life of Sethe, a runaway slave living in the 124 home in Ohio. After frightening her two oldest sons by murdering their sister through an act of love, they left the home, leaving 124 with just Sethe, Denver, and the ghost of the murdered child, Beloved. As Sethe struggles with loving and forgiving herself, a flawed man by the name of Paul D comes to love Sethe but the past hardships of being a slave holds him back from truly being able to love her. Beloved appears in human form where she later breaks open Paul D's rusted closed heart. It takes a long time for Sethe to realize that this new person in their lives is her child, Beloved. Throughout the novel, Sethe struggles with loving herself but that struggle deepens when she learns that this person is the daughter that she murdered. Sethe just wants to give all her love to her child, leaving not too much to spare for her daughter Denver. As Sethe begins to give her life over to Beloved, figuratively and literally, we learn the importance of learning to love yourself first, the wrong way to love others, and also the effects of slavery.

As Sethe tries to forget the past, markings of her abuse live on her back, making it hard to forget the hardships of slavery. Many like to think of scars as battle wounds but that implies a positive way of thinking. The scars are not really representative of a

positive experience but they can be seen as a coping mechanism for dealing with the tragedy. Allowing other people into your past can be very risky. In this time, enslaved people were taught to stay to themselves in order to survive and that is exactly what they did. To open up to someone, for them, requires vulnerability. As a slave, Sethe was raped by Schoolteacher and his nephews where she also had her milk stolen from her as she was held down while being pregnant. With memories like these, people have to find different ways of dealing with traumatizing situations. For some, just changing the name of what happened can help the person cope with the scars that are left behind. When Sethe states, "Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still" (Morrison, 20) it is to reveal the contrast between the traumatizing event and the way she views the aftermath of it all. The imagery of Sethe's scars being formed into a tree is to reveal how the healing is a form of new life and new beginnings. For these scars to be on her back is to show the burden that she has to carry on a regular basis for the rest of her life. The irony of making the dead and coiled skin into a lively tree is to show the concept of survival; it shows the choice people make about whether to dwell in the past or to find ways to move on in their lives. The fact that this tree continues to grow on her back is to reveal that the scar will continue to grow and continue to have an effect on her life. This illustrates the larger idea about how in order to move on and continue life, you must deal with your problems in your own ways.

The idea of the traumatizing event can make someone feel powerless and to reveal your truth can make you become vulnerable. Sethe became vulnerable toward Paul D when she allows him to see and feel the scars on her back as they stood in the

kitchen. When he first caught sight of her scars, he thought of them as the most beautiful and delicate thing that he has ever seen. This affection results in them having intercourse but afterwards, his views of her tree turns for the worst: “And the wrought-iron maze he had explored in the kitchen like a gold miner pawing through pay dirt was in fact a revolting clump of scars. Not a tree, as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting” (Morrison, 25). When you think of a tree, you see beauty but when you think of wrought-iron, it depicts something dark and ugly. The simile of comparing Paul D’s actions to one of a gold miner pawing through pay dirt is to create the two contrasting ideas of how scars can either be beautiful and a symbol of survival-battle scars or that scars can make you ugly, animalistic, and less beautiful. The contrasting ideas serve to make the reader question his intentions severely because it reveals that he only saw her beauty and worth when he desired her body for sexual intention. Once they had sex, his attitude changed in a more negative viewing. This reveals how humans are never satisfied and in fact, are very judgmental. For Paul D to so easily judge Sethe’s scars, shows how people in society feel the need to judge others for their past traumas and wounds. Sethe does not need to visually see her scars in order to know their value and believe them to be beautiful. She chooses to see them as battle scars and to not allow the oppression of being an ex-slave define her. This reveals the larger theme of how hurt people, hurt people, meaning that when people are suffering, they want others to suffer with them.

Although Paul D did not mean for Sethe to suffer as he did, he is not capable of showing and feeling love due to slavery. Slavery had dehumanized Paul D, literally

taking away his ability to love because he was struck with fear and had no choice but to sleep with the cows-forcing him to question his own manhood. His entire manhood was taken away from him the day he was raped-forced to have oral sex with the chain gang leaders: "Occasionally a kneeling man chose gunshot in his head as the price, maybe, of taking a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus" (Morrison, 127). It can be perceived that it was easier to die than it would be to live with this traumatic experience. The brutal image of taking a gunshot to the head reveals how much pride, humanity and manliness was taken away. Some of these men would rather kill themselves than deal with having their manhood and humanity being taken away. Although Paul D survives these horrors, his heart is replaced with a tobacco tin revealing that he lost his heart and soul. These experiences are what prohibited Paul D from being able to love and be loved. The slave culture has consumed many and has continued to be passed on into today's society through the act of judgement. Morrison is telling the reader that we overcome this cycle in order to move on.

In the very end of the novel after the town has "run off" Beloved, Paul returns to Sethe and begs her to accept his love: "He wants to put his story next to hers. "Sethe," he says, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow. He leans over and grabs her hand. With the other he touches her face. "You your best thing, Sethe. You are'" (Morrison, 322). Morrison argues that in order to move on, you have to want to move on. The word "yesterday" is a representation or symbol of past. When Paul D states, "We got more yesterday than anybody" it is to say that all they have is the past but also that he wants more than that. Paul D doesn't want to only be

stuck living in the past; he wants to move forward and he doesn't want to leave Sethe behind. The imagery of when "he leans over and grabs her hand" is used to reveal unity. This form of unity makes it easier for them both because facing their "yesterday" alone would be scary but it's necessary in order to move on. To be able to face the past with someone else brings comfort and security, making you more likely to grow and conquer. The quote, "You your best thing Sethe. You are" relates back to having to love yourself first. As Paul D reassures Sethe that she is the best thing she has, he also reveals that in order to move on, she has to come to terms with herself and accept herself and be able to love herself. Morrison is proposing that in order to overcome, we must help lift each other up instead of knocking each other down, telling us that this is the only way to overcome the societal slave cycle.

Love can be a confusing and complex situation. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, both authors reveal that self-love is freedom and that the effects of the wrong kind of love and connection can hold you back, rendering you from becoming your true and free self. This is caused by the mark that slavery has left and passed on through generations. The authors reveal that things will only change if we take the necessary steps to change it as Paul D did to help Sethe in *Beloved* and as Janie did for herself in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Works Cited

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. HarperLuxe, 2008.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Vintage, 1997.